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ABSTRACT

A survey of 60 managing editors of daily newspapers was conducted to determine the qualities editors look for in the reporters and copy editors they hire, the specific academic preparation they would like reporters and copy editors to have, and specific problems editors have with their present staff members. This paper describes the methodology of the study, presents the results in narrative and tabular form, and poses questions for journalism educators, based on the survey results. Analysis of the results indicated that mastery of the English language led the list of qualities looked for in reporters (mentioned by 68% of the editors) and in copy editors (mentioned by 70% of the editors). Lack of such mastery was the most frequently cited problem (58%). In describing the ideal reporter, editors also placed heavy emphasis on reporting skills (53%) and on such personal qualities as desire, dedication, and commitment (55%); curiosity (55%); initiative, aggressiveness, and high energy level (38%); and honesty, objectivity, integrity, and a high ethical sense (33%). A lack of one or more of these qualities was the second most common problem (52%). (GW)

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THE "IDEAL" REPORTER

THE "IDEAL" COPY EDITOR

A survey of 60 daily newspaper editors

by

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The 'Ideal' Reporter
The 'Ideal' Copy Editor

What do newspaper editors mean when they talk about "a good reporter" or "a good copy editor"?

Sixty newspaper editors surveyed by mail or in person said they look first for a mastery of the English language, as demonstrated by writing skills, when they hire reporters and copy editors. They also look for a high degree of dedication, a great deal of curiousity and a highly developed sense of news values.

Editors differed on the kind of academic preparation required for the two jobs. Sixty per cent of the editors said they expect a reporter to have a broad liberal education while only 38 per cent said they expect reporters to have taken journalism skills courses. Editors varied widely on the academic preparation of copy editors, listing practical journalism courses, courses in grammar, a general liberal arts education and English courses in about equal numbers.

More than half the surveyed editors represent Indiana newspapers with the others scattered through dailies in Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, Florida, Virginia and the District of Columbia. Thirty-seven of the 60 work for newspapers of less than 75,000 circulation; 23, for larger newspapers. There were few significant differences in expectations between the two groups.

The questionnaire was open-ended. All editors were asked five questions:

1. If you could hire an ideal reporter, what qualities would you look for?
2. What specific academic preparation should that ideal reporter bring to the job?
3. If you could hire an ideal copy editor, what qualities would you look for?
4. What specific academic preparation should that ideal copy editor bring to the job?
5. If you have members of your staff who do not possess the qualities you have outlined above, in what specific respects do they fall short?

Responses to the last question confirmed the responses to the first four. Fifty-eight per cent of the editors said their biggest problem with staffers is a lack of basic language skills, particularly knowledge of word usage. Fifty-two per cent mentioned a lack of personal qualities, including dedication to the job, lack of curiousity of lack of news judgment.

Funding has been obtained for broadening the survey, but the preliminary findings suggest strongly that journalism educators should emphasize grammar, spelling, word usage, syntax, organization and news values in all basic skills courses. They further suggest that no one who has not demonstrated a command of the language should be graduated from a newspaper sequence. Journalism schools and departments ought also require their students to take courses in government, economics, history and the hard sciences beyond those required for a bachelor of arts degree.

Ralph L. Holsinger
Indiana University

The 'Ideal' Reporter
The 'Ideal' Copy Editor

Errata sheet

p. 8, end of first paragraph: delete (See Table 1)

p. 11, third line in first paragraph below the table: make it "interviews"

p. 14, in first table the percentage figure for basic writing skills should be 70.

p. 19, second line of next-to-last paragraph should start with the word "complained."

p. 22, fourth line, second paragraph, change "at" to "in."

p. 25, fourth line, second full paragraph, change "leads" to "heads."

ninth line, same paragraph, spell it "nurturing."

Ralph L. Holsinger
Indiana University

What do newspaper editors mean when they talk about "a good reporter," or "a good copy editor"?

What personal qualities and what skills is a managing editor looking for when he or she hires a reporter or copy editor? What specific academic preparation should an applicant freshly graduated from the university bring to the job?

As a former reporter and managing editor who has been teaching reporting and editing for a dozen years, I thought I knew the answers to these questions and reflected my knowledge in my teaching. However, a semester's sabbatical offered me an opportunity to go to the editors themselves, 60 of them, to get their answers to these questions.

I also was interested in learning whether new times and new technology had brought changes in expectations during the 12 years since I last worked in a newsroom. Were we teaching our students what they needed in today's newsrooms--and were likely to need in tomorrow's--or were we simply using the classroom to glorify a past that might not have been as good in reality as it seemed through an aura of nostalgia?

I have learned that times have indeed changed. The rapid advent of the video display terminal (VDT) and electronic copy processing has brought new demands on reporters and editor. But most editors assured me that the technique required by these marvels can be mastered fairly quickly on the job and

need not unduly concern us in the classroom.

Beyond the new technology lies newspaper journalism's real concern--an audience that has changed, or seems to have changed, dramatically in the last generation. It is better educated than ever. The Bureau of Census reports that 55% of us over 25 years of age have had at least four years of high school; that one in five has had at least a year of college and that one in 10 is a college graduate. A generation ago the median educational level was the ninth grade.

It is more sophisticated than ever. Travel opportunities created in part by compulsory service in the armed forces and reinforced by more than two decades of relatively cheap air fares have broadened the interests and the knowledge of many Americans. Television has given most of us first-hand exposure to the public image of the newsmakers of the world and, in all its programming elements, has either raised our level of knowledge, at least superficially, or grossly misinformed us, depending upon your point of view. But whatever it has done to us, television has become a potent competitor to newspapers as a source of news and is blamed for recent declines in newspaper circulation. We are all so familiar with Mr. Roper's statistics that I will not bore you by repeating them here.

In my survey I found editors who are concerned about the public, particularly young people, and who are trying to meet the challenge of enticing more people into reading newspapers. There is no unanimity about what needs to be done, but I was told that today's and tomorrow's reporters must be highly intelligent and broadly knowledgeable or they will run the risk of error that will win the disdain of some part of the audience.

And yet, others told me, they must not be too Olympian or they will lose touch with the people they are supposed to serve.

I've also been reminded that editors still are of two minds about us in journalism education. I heard praise for the skills and the dedication some of our graduates bring to the job. Many managing editors who have been in the business a score or more of years told me their young staffers are the best they've ever had. But I also heard complaints that this best is still not good enough, especially in basic command of the language and in dedication to the job.

Moreover, I've concluded that we should consider some changes in our programs of journalism education to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's newspapers.

Methodology

Five questions were asked:

1. If you could hire an ideal reporter, what qualities would you look for?

2. What specific academic preparation should that ideal reporter bring to the job?

3. If you could hire an ideal copy editor, what qualities would you look for?

4. What specific academic preparation should that ideal reporter bring to the job?

5. If you have members of your staff who do not possess the qualities you have outlined above, in what specific respects do they fall short? In short, what problems do you have with your staff?

An open-ended approach was used because I wanted to avoid any possibility of leading the subjects to predetermined conclusions. I wanted the editors to search their thinking and their experience and tell me what they looked for in their hiring and in their expectations for job performance.

At first impression, some editors said they thought I was asking the obvious, but, like the editor of a 6,000 circulation daily in Indiana, had second thoughts about it. He wrote:

"I find my answers are less specific than I thought they would be after first reading your questions. That may indicate I am no more rigorous in thinking about my profession than most editors I have worked for."

The questionnaire was submitted first to about 30 managing editors at a meeting of the Indiana Associated Press Managing Editors in South Bend last September. About half responded. This was followed up in October by a mailing to the managing editor or editor of all the daily newspapers in Indiana from which a response had not been received in September. The total was 78. From these two attempts I received 38 returns. One editor of a newspaper outside Indiana also responded by mail for a total of 39 written responses.

These were supplemented by interviews with 21 managing editors and executive editors in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, Florida, Virginia, Ohio and the District of Columbia. I have submitted a request for funds for 25 additional interviews in New York, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri. However, because of the high degree of consistency among the responses received thus far, I

feel the additional interviews will add to the strength of the study without changing the results materially.

The interviews were recorded on tape. Excerpts will be used to produce two audio tapes for our learning laboratory so that students may hear prospective employers tell what they are looking for in job applicants. Other excerpts will be used to reinforce points made by instructors in reporting and editing classes.

Because most newspapers in Indiana are small, 33 of the written returns were from newspapers of less than 75,000 circulation; 6, from larger newspapers. Of the interviews, 17 were with editors of newspapers of more than 75,000 circulation; 4, with editors of smaller newspapers. Thus, 37 of the responses, or 62%, represent smaller dailies and 23, or 38%, larger. It should be noted that a comparison between the mailed and the oral responses and between the responses from the larger newspapers and the smaller showed few significant differences. No claim is made that this is a scientific study of a carefully-drawn cross-section of American managing editors. But it is a large enough sample on which to base some questions for journalism educators.

Responses to the questionnaires were coded by graduate students employed by Indiana University's Center for New Journalism and tabulated by computer. Because the questions were open-ended, some degree of judgment had to be used in categorizing the responses. This judgment was checked by my reading of all of the responses after they had been coded.

For each of the first four questions, the first four responses were coded in order. For Question 5 only the first three responses were coded. Where the responses made it possible, related qualities were lumped together.

Findings

1. If you could hire an ideal reporter, what qualities would you look for?

First Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
1. Writing skills, including spelling, grammar	17	5	22	36.7
2. Reporting and interviewing skills.	4	5	9	15.
3. Honesty, objectivity, integrity	2	3	5	8.3
4. Dedication to journalism, sense of mission.	4	3	7	11.7
5. Initiative, aggressiveness.	4	1	5	8.3
6. Curiosity	5	4	9	15.
11. Well-groomed, clean	1	0	1	1.7
12. Good general knowledge. . .	0	2	2	3.3
	37	23	60	
Second Answer				
1. Writing skills (as above).	3	5	8	14.
2. Reporting and interviewing.	13	2	15	26.3
3. Honesty (as above)	5	2	7	12.3
4. Dedication (as above) . . .	6	5	11	19.3
5. Initiative (as above) . . .	2	3	5	8.8
6. Curiosity	4	4	8	14.
9. Knowledge of photography. .	1	0	1	1.8
10. Knowledge of community. . .	0	1	1	1.8
11. Well-groomed (as above) . .	0	1	1	1.8
	35	22	57	
Third Answer				
1. Writing skills (as above).	4	4	8	15.7
2. Reporting and interviewing.	1	3	4	7.8
3. Honesty (as above).	5	1	6	11.8
4. Dedication (as above) . . .	6	4	10	19.6
5. Initiative (as above) . . .	5	4	9	17.6
6. Curiosity	3	3	6	11.8
7. Knowledge of English. . . .	1	0	1	2.
9. Knowledge of photography. .	3	0	3	5.9
10. Knowledge of community. . .	2	1	3	5.9
11. Well-groomed (as above) . .	1	0	1	2.
	31	20	51	
Fourth Answer				
1. Writing skills (as above) .	2	1	3	8.1
2. Reporting and interviewing.	1	3	4	10.8
3. Honesty (as above).	1	1	2	5.4
4. Dedication (as above) . . .	2	3	5	13.5
5. Initiative (as above) . . .	3	1	4	10.8
6. Curiosity	7	3	10	27.
7. Knowledge of English. . . .	1	2	3	8.1
8. Knowledge of history. . . .	1	0	1	2.7
9. Knowledge of photography. .	1	0	1	2.7
10. Knowledge of community. . .	2	0	2	5.4
11. Well-groomed (as above) . .	2	0	2	5.4
	23	14	37	

Some editors mentioned more than four qualities they would look for in the ideal reporter but the responses became so scattered past that point that there was no point in compiling them. (See Table 1)

It should be noted that my experience with the interviews indicates that not too much significance should be attached to the order in which editors listed or mentioned the qualities tabulated above. Some would use qualifying remarks such as, "Assuming an ability to write. . ." or "The order doesn't necessarily have any significance." However, there were others who did place a primary emphasis on writing or on other qualities. There will be more about this in the discussion below.

Once this has been said, it also should be noted that editors of smaller newspapers tended to put a greater primary emphasis on writing skills than did editors of larger newspapers (45.9% to 21.7%). Editors of the larger papers tended to put a greater premium on reporting skills and on dedication to the job than did the editors of the smaller newspapers.

When all four answers were compiled without regard to the size of the newspaper, the totals were as follows:

Quality	Number of Mentions	Percentage of Total	Rank
1. Writing skills (as above) .	41	68%	1
2. Reporting skills.	32	53%	4
3. Honesty (as above).	20	33%	6
4. Dedication (as above) . . .	33	55%	2.5
5. Initiative (as above) . . .	23	38%	5
6. Curiosity	33	55%	2.5
7. Knowledge of English. . . .	4	7%	10.
8. Knowledge of history	1	2%	12.
9. Knowledge of photography. .	5	8%	8.5
10. Knowledge of community. . .	6	10%	7.
11. Well-groomed (as above) . .	5	8%	8.5
12. Good general knowledge	2	3%	11.

Obviously, caution is in order in interpreting the above statistics. That only 41 of 60 editors mentioned writing skills as a quality to be sought in the ideal reporter cannot be interpreted to mean that 19 put no value on writing. Only one of those interviewed volunteered the information that he still had room on his staff for an excellent reporter who could not write well. That reporter was assigned to the police beat and gave all of his information to a rewrite man. Several others said the day of the reporter who can't write is past.

Nor should too much be read into the fact that only a third of the editors mentioned any one of several personal traits that could be coded as "honesty, integrity, objectivity, ethical sense." The managing editor of one respected metropolitan daily in Florida spoke at some length about the qualities he looked for in reporters. At lunch with the publisher, he was reviewing his response. At the end the publisher said, "You've apparently left out the only quality I would have mentioned--integrity. With me that comes first." The managing editor replied, "Of course. With me, that's understood."

My point is this: One ought read into this survey only what was said and should not attempt to draw conclusions from what was not said. Thus, it would appear safe to conclude that the editors who responded to this survey are looking for skilled writers who are adept at gathering information from all kinds of news sources, who have a high degree of curiosity about what is going on around them, and who are strongly committed to working as reporters. This will be developed further in the discussion.

2. What specific academic preparation should that ideal reporter bring to the job?

First Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
1. Basic writing skills, including grammar and spelling	10	2	12	20.
2. Journalism skills courses, including reporting. . . .	8	3	11	18.3
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics	1	0	1	1.7
4. Broad liberal arts education	10	15	25	41.7
5. English courses.	4	1	5	8.3
7. Economics and business courses.	0	1	1	1.7
11. Don't care if otherwise qualified.	4	1	5	8.3
	37	23	60	
Second Answer				
1. Basic writing skills (as above)	3	3	6	12.8
2. Journalism skills courses.	3	3	6	12.8
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics	5	3	8	17.
4. Broad liberal arts education	6	2	8	17.
5. English courses.	0	1	1	2.1
6. Political science, government	3	1	4	8.5
7. Economics and business courses.	3	3	6	12.8
8. History and social studies	4	2	6	12.8
9. Science courses.	1	0	1	2.1
10. Philosophy courses	1	0	1	2.1
	29	18	47	
Third Answer				
1. Basic writing skills (as above)	1	0	1	2.7
2. Journalism skills courses.	2	0	2	5.4
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics	2	1	3	8.1
4. Broad liberal arts education	1	0	1	2.7
5. English courses.	2	3	5	13.5
6. Political science, government	7	2	9	24.3
7. Economics and business courses.	3	3	6	16.2
8. History and social studies	2	4	6	16.2
9. Science courses	1	1	2	5.4
12. Photography courses. . . .	0	1	1	2.7
13. Knowledge of electronics .	1	0	1	2.7
	22	15	37	

Fourth Answer	Under 35,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
1. Basic writing skills(as above)	0	2	2	6.7
2. Journalism skills courses. .	2	2	4	13.3
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics	1	1	2	6.7
4. Broad liberal arts education	2	0	2	6.7
5. English courses.	0	1	1	3.3
6. Political science, government	3	2	5	16.7
7. Economics and business courses.	2	1	3	10.
8. History and social sciences.	3	1	4	13.3
9. Science courses.	0	1	1	3.3
10. Philosophy courses	3	1	4	13.3
12. Photography courses.	2	0	2	6.7
	18	12	30	

Here, the caution noted at the end of the first set of tables is more in order than ever. It was evident from the interview that many of the managing editors, particularly the older ones, think that a liberal arts education necessarily includes substantive courses in government, American history, economics, philosophy and the natural sciences. Those editors who are aware of the erosion in liberal arts requirements in recent years made a point of emphasizing the necessity of courses in government, American history and economics, particularly the latter.

It also was evident that some of those editors interviewed did not associate a journalism education with a broad background in the liberal arts. These topics will be developed more fully in the discussion.

The totals for all four answers are as follows:

	Total	Percent	Rank
1. Basic writing skills (as above). .	21	35	3
2. Journalism skills courses	23	38	2
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics	14	23	7
4. Broad liberal arts education . . .	36	60	1
5. English courses	12	20	8
6. Political science, government. . .	18	30	4
7. Economics and business courses . .	16	27	5/6
8. History and social sciences. . . .	16	27	5/6
9. Science courses.	4	7	11
10. Philosophy courses	5	8	9/10
11. Don't care if otherwise qualified.	5	8	9/10
12. Photography courses.	3	5	12
13. Knowledge of electronics	1	2	13

3. If you could hire an ideal copy editor, what qualities would you look for?

First Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
1. Basic writing skills, command of the English language	19	7	26	46.4
2. Ability to condense and clarify	3	2	5	8.9
3. Headline writing, layout, photo cropping, speed.	5	3	8	14.3
4. Eye for leads, news sense	1	4	5	8.9
5. Works well with others, subordinates self, pride in work	1	0	1	1.8
6. Patience, even temper, ability to work under pressure.	1	3	4	7.1
7. Curiousity, skepticism.	3	2	5	8.9
8. Dedication, commitment, motivation.	0	2	2	3.6
	33	23	56	

Second Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
1. Basic writing skills (as above)	1	6	7	12.7
2. Ability to condense and clarify	9	6	15	27.3
3. Headline writing (as above)	15	2	17	30.9
4. Eye for leads, news sense	3	2	5	9.1
5. Works well with others (as above)	3	0	3	5.5
7. Curiousity, skepticism	0	6	6	10.9
8. Dedication, commitment, motivation	0	1	1	1.8
9. Knowledge of community	1	0	1	1.8
	32	23	55	

Third Answer

1. Basic writing skills (as above)	3	3	6	12.5
2. Ability to condense and clarify	0	1	1	2.1
3. Headline writing (as above)	4	4	8	16.7
4. Eye for leads, news sense.	7	0	7	14.6
5. Works well with others (as above)	7	4	11	22.9
6. Patience (as above). .	3	2	5	10.4
7. Curiousity, skepticism.	2	2	4	8.3
8. Dedication, commitment, motivation	1	4	5	10.4
9. Knowledge of community.	1	0	1	2.1
	28	20	48	

Fourth Answer

1. Basic writing skills (as above)	1	2	3	9.4
2. Ability to condense and clarify	1	0	1	3.1
3. Headline writing (as above)	0	4	4	12.5
4. Eye for leads, news sense.	2	3	5	15.6
5. Works well with others (as above)	3	1	4	12.5
6. Patience (as above). .	5	2	7	21.9
7. Curiousity, skepticism.	3	1	4	12.5
8. Dedication, commitment, motivation	2	1	3	9.4
9. Knowledge of community.	1	0	1	3.1
	18	14	32	

Comparative figures seem to indicate that editors of smaller newspapers place a slightly greater emphasis on basic writing skills and on headline writing than do editors of the larger newspapers. The latter seem to place a somewhat greater emphasis on news sense and a questioning mind. Again, one ought not make too much of such comparisons because some of those interviewed assumed a command of the language as a basic quality in anyone considered for desk duty.

The totals for all four answers are as follows:

	Total	Percent	Rank
1. Basic writing skills (as above).	42	7	1
2. Ability to condense and clarify.	22	37	3/4
3. Headline writing (as above). . .	37	62	2
4. Eye for leads, news sense. . . .	22	37	3/4
5. Works well with others (as above)	19	32	5/6
6. Patience (as above).	16	27	7
7. Curiousity, skepticism	19	32	5/6
8. Dedication, commitment, motivation	11	18	8
9. Knowledge of community	3	5	9

The same caution with respect to the failure to mention certain qualities should be observed here as with the earlier compilations of responses.

4. What specific academic preparation should that ideal copy editor bring to the job?

First Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
1. Mastery of grammar, spelling, syntax. . .	16	3	19	33.9
2. Practical journalism courses in reporting and editing	5	4	9	16.1
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics.	1	1	2	3.6
4. General liberal arts education	4	11	15	26.8
5. English courses . . .	3	3	6	10.7
11. Don't care if otherwise qualified	4	1	5	8.9

Second Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
1. Mastery of grammar (as above)	2	2	4	8.5
2. Practical journalism courses	11	3	14	29.8
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics . . .	4	3	7	14.9
4. General liberal arts education	2	0	2	4.3
5. English Courses . .	2	5	7	14.9
6. Political science, government	1	0	1	2.1
7. Economics, business courses	1	3	4	8.5
8. History courses. . .	2	3	5	10.6
11. Don't care if otherwise qualified	1	0	1	2.1
13. Maturity	0	1	1	2.1
14. Knowledge of the community	1	0	1	2.1
	27	20	47	

Third Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics. . . .	5	1	6	18.8
4. General liberal arts education	3	1	4	12.5
5. English courses . . .	1	4	5	15.6
6. Political science, government	2	4	6	18.8
7. Economics, business courses	3	1	4	12.5
8. History courses . . .	3	1	4	12.5
9. Science courses . . .	0	1	1	3.1
10. Philosophy courses. .	1	0	1	3.1
12. Ability to get along with people	0	1	1	3.1
	18	14	32	

Fourth Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
2. Practical journalism courses	1	1	3	15.
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics. . . .	0	2	2	10.
4. General liberal arts education	1	0	1	5
5. English courses . . .	1	1	2	10
6. Political science, government	1	0	1	5
7. Economics, business courses	2	1	3	15
8. History courses	2	2	4	20
12. Ability to get along with people	2	0	2	10
13. Maturity	1	0	1	5
14. Knowledge of the community	0	1	1	5
	11	9	20	

There is one marked difference between the two groups of editors. Editors of the smaller papers put their primary emphasis on preparation in English grammar, spelling and syntax, while editors of the larger newspapers placed their primary emphasis on a broad, general education. At the secondary level, editors of smaller newspapers say they are looking for copy editors who took courses in reporting and editing. Only 9 of the 23 editors of larger newspapers referred to such courses.

The totals for all four answers are as follows:

	Total	Percent	Rank
1. Mastery of grammar (as above) .	23	38	2
2. Practical journalism courses .	26	43	1
3. Journalism courses in law and ethics	17	28	5
4. General liberal arts education.	22	37	3
5. English courses.	20	33	4
6. Political science, government. .	8	13	8
7. Economics, business courses . .	11	18	7
8. History courses	13	22	6

The remainder were so scattered as to make further tabulation meaningless.

5. If you have members of your staff who do not possess the qualities you have outlined above, in what specific respects do they fall short? In short, what problems do you have with your staff?

First Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
1. Personal qualities lacking; not motivated, lack self-discipline. .	15	7	22	37.3
2. Lack basic skills; can't write, can't spell, poor word choice	15	10	25	42.4
3. No news sense	2	4	6	10.2
4. Lacks broad education	3	2	5	8.5
6. We can't afford quality people	1	0	1	1.7
7. We have no problems. .	1	0	1	1.7
	37	23	60	

Second Answer				
1. Personal qualities lacking	2	5	7	20.6
2. Lack basic skills .	6	4	10	29.4
3. No news sense	8	4	12	35.3
4. Lacks broad education.	2	1	3	8.8
5. "Scruffy" appearance .	1	0	1	2.9
	19	14	33	

Third Answer	Under 75,000 (37)	Over 75,000 (23)	Total	Percent
1. Personal qualities lacking	2	0	2	22.2
3. No news sense . . .	4	1	5	55.6
4. Lacks broad education .	1	0	1	11.1
5. "Scruffy" appearance . .	1	0	1	11.1
	8	1	9	

The totals for all three answers are as follows:

	Total	Percent	Rank
1. Personal qualities lacking . .	31	52	2
2. Lack basic skills	35	58	1
3. No news sense	23	38	3
4. Lacks broad education	9	15	4

The remaining problems are too scattered to have any significance.

Discussion

Clearly, the editors who participated in this survey place a high premium on mastery of the English language by both reporters and copy editors. It led the list of qualities looked for in reporters (68%) and in copy editors (70%). Lack of such mastery was the most frequently cited problem (58%).

The executive editor of a newspaper of 220,000 circulation in Florida put it this way: "I look for an ability to write and to communicate, of course. We want the kind of reporters who can swim in the English language, not trudge through it."

The managing editor of a Virginia daily with 30,000 circulation wrote of copy editors who have "a love and reverence of our language. The ability to improve copy by editing it. Adoration of significant detail. . . .And the ability to condense 600 words to six words. . ."

Such love and reverence are not always found in news staffers. The managing editor of an Indiana daily of 117,000 circulation wrote: "Youngsters coming into the field now don't know grammar and cannot spell. In other respects, they are better than we were." He has been an editor for 19 years.

The managing editor of an Ohio daily of 185,000 circulation emplained of reporters who "don't organize stories well enough and who tend to overwrite. Above all, they need to write more interestingly."

In listing the qualities of the ideal reporter, editors also placed heavy emphasis on reporting skills: the art of interviewing and the ability to recognize and mine sources of information, including public records and the material available in various kinds of libraries. These skills were mentioned by 53% of the editors.

The managing editor of a 53,000 circulation morning-evening combination in South Carolina placed reporting skills first among the qualities he seeks in new staffers. "The psychological aspects come first," he said. "I'm looking for stable individuals who are not overwhelmed by the idea of being a writer. I want people who are in the business because they want to be reporters first. If they happen to be writers, that's icing on the cake. The ideal reporter has a non-threatening personality. In a small market like ours, he must fit in with the people, be able to gain their confidence, get them to talk easily. I'm not talking about a weak stick. I want strong people, but they can't be abrasive and make it here."

An editor with a national reputation who has chosen to head the news operation of an 11,000 circulation daily in Tennessee for the last 27 years described his ideal reporter as "on the quiet side, but terribly persistent and inventive in finding ways to get at the news. He or she must be a digger with a passion for accuracy, checking and rechecking, but never a snooper. I expect reporters to respect a genuine right of privacy and to recognize the difference between privacy and secrecy. When it's required, they should be as aggressive as hell, but without being overbearing about it."

But the editor of a 27,000 circulation daily in Indiana wrote: "No aggressiveness, please. That overused cliche is part of what is wrong with today's news gatherers. They confuse aggressiveness with rudeness as they confuse cynicism with skepticism."

The "people" aspect of reporting skills was discussed by the managing editor of a 43,000 circulation daily in Indiana.

Writing of the problems with his staff, he said: "Most seasoned reporters tend to emulate their predecessors in covering beats. Some fail to remember that people make stories, buy papers, and read stories. Everything a journalist does should relate to people, and some journalists don't know enough about people, their tastes, habits, and behavior and attitudes to do their jobs effectively."

Beyond writing and reporting skills, editors describing the ideal reporter listed personal qualities that probably cannot be taught in journalism classes--such things as desire, dedication, commitment (55%); curiousity, an interest in everything (55%); initiative, aggressiveness, a high energy level (38%), and objectivity, honesty, integrity, a high ethical sense (33%). A lack of one or more of these qualities was the second-most-common problem (52%). A sampling of the comments will illustrate what is being sought here.

The managing editor of one of the nation's most respected dailies, who said he was receiving 70 to 80 staff applications a week, said he prefers to hire and keep people who "are reporters 24 hours a day. A good reporter is never off duty. He doesn't want to be." This was not good enough for the managing editor of a 115,000 daily circulation newspaper in Virginia. He said his first check-point is an applicant's attitude. "He's got to want to be a reporter despite anything. He's got to be willing to do anything on the paper. These are the kind who don't drift off into public relations or other things. These are the 28-hour-a-day newspapermen." The managing editor of a 15,000 circulation daily in Indiana added his own kicker to a similar litany: ". . .and works cheap."

A variation on the dedication theme was sounded by the editor of an 11,500 circulation daily in Indiana. His ideal reporter has "curiousity about anything and everything, at work, on the way to work, after work, all the time." The managing editor of an Indiana daily of 165,000 circulation said he tends to look askance of a reporter who drives the same route to and from the office every day. "I want them to be out looking around for things that ought to be in the paper," he said.

How do editors find out whether reporter candidates are sufficiently dedicated to the job? Many of those who were interviewed said they look at experience on a college newspaper or at summer internships while the student is in college. Time after time I asked, "If you had two applicants for the same job, one of whom had excellent grades in journalism courses but little or no experience on the college newspaper, and the other whose grades weren't so good but who had done a lot of work on the paper, which would you choose?" With few exceptions, the latter would be hired. One managing editor of a larger newspaper said, "A kid who hadn't worked on a newspaper when he had the chance for the asking would have a hell of a time convincing me that he really wanted to work on a newspaper."

Some editors looked beyond service to the paper to broader goals. The editor of an Indiana daily of 76,000 circulation wrote that his ideal reporter has "a burning desire to know what makes things tick, who makes them tick, a concern for the public right-to-know as the main thurst for his raison d'etre. (Writing we can develop. Spelling, we can despair.)"

Journalism schools did not fare well when editors began listing the academic qualifications a reporter should bring to the job. Despite their concern for writing and reporting skills, 60% of them saw a broad liberal arts education as essential. This compares with 38% who mentioned basic reporting and editing courses and 35% who mentioned writing courses. The first of these percentages can be made almost unanimous by including those editors who listed courses in political science, economics, history and other elements of the traditional liberal arts curriculum.

Despite what these figures seem to show, only one of the interviewed editors said flatly that he does not recommend that prospective journalists take an undergraduate journalism program. "I tell them to get a good education," he said. "There is no substitute for a good education and work on a smaller newspaper." (One of our undergraduate degree holders is a major sub-editor of that same newspaper and another was hired at about the time of my interview.)

Here is a sampling of what other editors said about educational preparation:

The managing editor of a 165,000 circulation daily in Indiana said he expects applicants to have a college degree, but he doesn't care what it's in. He said he expects them to have some special interest--in religion, or science or whatever, and be willing to follow it up. In that direction, he said, lies ultimate specialization in an area of the reporter's interest. There was no unanimity among editors on the road to a reporter specialty. A few thought specialization could begin in college; more thought it ought to wait until the

reporter had established his or her credentials as a generalist; a few thought reporters ought never become specialists lest they find themselves in that rarified atmosphere "where the specialists talk only to each other in a language no one else can understand."

The managing editor of an Ohio daily of 103,000 circulation saw some value in a journalism degree if a broad liberal arts program went along with it. But he added that the best reporters on his paper worked on the student newspaper at the same time. "You learn more from the student newspaper than you do in the classroom," he said. "I know, I've worked there."

Finally a word about the individual mentions of courses in government and economics. Three comments sum up the rationale of the sizeable minority who mentioned these courses:

The editor of an Ohio daily of 150,000 said there are hazards in a college education, "it tends to create elitists in a business that ought to be close to the people," but he thinks reporters should have a good grounding "in numbers--in economics, auditing and accounting." This is where investigative reporting starts. Numbers also are essential to an understanding of how government works. "Whatever the politicians say, what they do starts with a budget, and that's numbers. And if they steal from us, you start with numbers to pin them down."

The executive editor of a metropolitan morning-evening combination in South Carolina said, "We must depend on the universities to broaden their curricula so that the J-student

can understand accounting. There ought to be a requirement for some minimal work in finance and economics. These days, a reporter must know the difference between fiscal and monetary policy to avoid the ridicule of those who do."

The managing editor of a 175,000 daily in Florida said his prime problem is with young reporters who don't have enough background in government and business to understand how our system operates. "If you don't know about the committee system in the legislature, or can't read a budget, or don't know where taxes and wages come from and what profit is all about, then you can't do an adequate job of reporting," he said.

To no one's surprise, managing editors want copy editors who are masters of English usage, who can tighten copy without destroying the writer's style, spot errors, answer unanswered questions, write accurate leads that still manage to sparkle, select news stories with unerring regard for reader interests and dummy a visually attractive page, who can do all these things content in anonymity while winning the respect if not the love of the reporting staff. That's all they want, but it's not what they usually get. The care and nuturing of copy editors remains one of the biggest concerns of newspaper management. This is especially true as newspapers convert to VDTs and electronic copy processing. In the days of hot type, a copy editor could blow one now and then in the fairly certain knowledge that a linotype operator or the proof reader would stop his gaffe short of the press. Now, on a

good many newspapers large and small, when the copy editor pushes the button on his video terminal the images on the screen are converted into a strip of paper that will be pasted into the page form from which the press plate will be made. Thus, more than ever, the copy desk is responsible for the tone, the style, the flavor of the newspaper. Editors told me that copy editors are not as scarce as they were a few years ago, but persuading a good reporter to make the switch to the desk still requires a touch of the con artist, judging from some of the battle stories I was told.

Only the very smallest newspapers escape the copy editor problem. The editor-president of a 6,000 circulation daily in Indiana spoke for several of the same class when he wrote: "We don't have a copy editor, so I don't know what one does. We probably need one."

The managing editor of a 64,000 daily in the same state offered one of the more concise listings of qualifications most editors expect from occupants of what used to be called "the rim." The ideal copy editor, he said, is "one who has good command of the language and able to pass a high school spelling test. One who has the feel and enthusiasm for writing heads and editing and the breed who can stay pinned down to a copy desk and slug it out with no glory or extra reward. One, finally, who has a balanced news judgment and able to handle high-speed wires without panic."

The managing editor of a 218,000 daily in Ohio said the copy editor has "the most important job in daily journalism. The good ones are readers, they read everything, especially the news, and they know a little about everything going on in the world. They are purists in the use of the language, insisting on good, standard, ordinary English. They are quick to challenge stories that don't ring true. They have a knack for headlines, and they don't write them in jargon. The best headlines are an art form. Yes, a good copy editor is an ingenious purist."

Another editor thought a good copy desk was one occupied by "a lot of trivia experts." Others talked of an ability to handle people. One said copy editors need to be seen as helping reporters, not putting them down.

But there are problems, particularly on morning papers where reporting staffs tend to work a day shift while the copy desk works at night. One managing editor said a lack of interaction with reporters, coupled with a lack of public recognition, causes serious morale problems, even on his Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper. He said copy editors suffer from a lack of "psychic income," no matter what salaries they are paid.

Other editors talked of giving copy editors a chance to write--book reviews, people profiles, editorials--or to give them responsibility for putting together one or more pages, starting with selection of the copy and art. Another was toying with the idea of putting the copy editor's name at the end of stories that required more than routine editing.

The surveyed editors set high educational standards for copy editors although the questionnaires do not reflect as great an insistence on a broad liberal arts education as was the case with reporters. There was a tendency for respondents to answer Question 4 by saying, "The same as for reporters, but with more emphasis on grammar and English usage courses." The managing editor of a South Carolina daily of 90,000 circulation also added "more courses in government, plus courses in languages, ours and others, because we borrow from so many other languages." A couple suggested courses in linguistics.

Behind this was a frequently stated concern for the meaning of words. Editors complained that the young people coming onto their staffs today don't seem to appreciate the fine points of word usage. The editors saw this as leading to an erosion in meaning that leads to reader misunderstanding of news stories. Two managing editors were discussing refresher courses in grammar and usage for their staffs.

Many of the common staff problems mentioned by the editors already have been referred to. However, mention should be made of one other that recurred with sufficient frequency to make it significant.

The same South Carolina editor who sees a need for copy editors being versed in a foreign language said his biggest staff problem is "the failure to maintain balance in controversial stories. Some of our reporters are not going to all sides. They are not pursuing the story to the end.

As a result we are sometimes rightly accused of being unfair." A managing editor in Ohio complained of reporters "who are insufficiently challenging. They are too quick to accept a statement as fact, especially when they agree with it." And the executive editor of a Kentucky morning-evening combination complained of reporters "who care too little for fairness, who tend to be advocates in some ways."

Perhaps it was said best by the editor-general manager of an Indiana newspaper of 5,300 circulation:

"Right now we have a basically good staff. The biggest drawback over the years has not been in preparation or abilities. Newsmen too often come here with loyalties to every cause other than the newspaper and lack of respect or understanding for the business--a thing they like to rationalize as ethics. They seek to criticize before they understand. They disdain writing the routine news that is the bread and butter of newspapers and wallow in wordy social features on their pet thing or personal cause. Some are too academic and do not get to know people."

Conclusion

Sixty editors, some self-chosen, others selected because the surveyor respected them or found them handy, do not comprise a scientific sample of the nation's 1750 or so daily newspaper managing editors. However, several refrains which kept appearing in the mailed questionnaires and in the interviews do suggest and offer support for the following questions:

1. Should we in journalism education limit enrollment in the newspaper sequence to students who show proficiency in grammar, syntax and spelling? Editors have been accusing us of not teaching these things. We who try to teach writing, reporting and editing know that many students come to us with serious deficiencies in language skills. Can we correct these deficiencies within the confines of a university curriculum? Given the pool of those already reasonably proficient, and the fact that our schools already are turning out more would-be journalists in a year than the business can absorb in a decade, do we have to concern ourselves with the semi-literate who rather think it would be fun to be a reporter? Some schools already require proficiency in the language as a condition for admission. Should the rest of us go the same route?

2. A related question: Should we teach one course that would focus exclusively on word usage, grammar, syntax and spelling without much regard to newspaper story form or reporting methods? Or should we mix a heavier dose of these basics into conventional reporting and editing courses? The survey results make it clear that editors of newspapers of all sizes are placing a higher premium on good writing. And they said one of their major problems is caused by reporters who can't write well. Can we pretend to be serious about preparing students for journalism as a profession and continue to run the risk of having them measured on the job and found wanting? How many of you have had editors say of your

graduates what one of those surveyed said about one of ours: "I've had two J grads in the last two years, one from I.U., one from _____. I'm sorry to say, Ralph, the one from I.U. needs constant prodding on the type of questions to ask, his writing is only fair, and he needs pushing on follow-up stories. The one from _____ couldn't spell, and finally has gone into PR work."

3. Should we require some kind of intelligence test, or at least a general awareness test, of students entering the newspaper sequence? A word that appears frequently in the survey forms is "intelligence." Editors made the point that this is a complex world whose affairs can be reported intelligently only by reporters who are themselves intelligent. With the attacks that continue to be made by politicians, government officials and even by some judges on journalism's First Amendment status can we continue to regard newspaper journalism as a playground for the ignorant?

4. This leads to the related question: Given the strong demand on the part of surveyed editors for reporters and copy editors with a broad liberal education, should we require courses that will give our students that kind of education? At Indiana, the School of Journalism is a part of the College of Arts and Sciences and our students must meet the distribution requirements of the College. In addition, we require our students to take a minimum of 25 hours in any other department of the College (telecommunications excepted).

But if your College of Arts and Sciences is like ours, the distribution requirement doesn't mean much. At Indiana, it is possible for a student to get through without taking a single college-level foreign language course. High school work in a foreign language can be converted into college credit. The College requires only four courses in the hard sciences and mathematics. It is quite likely that two of those courses could be in some aspect of environmental affairs, a third could be the basic psychology course, and the fourth might be a beginning geography course. The humanities requirement (four courses) can be met by courses in literature, or in folk lore or the American cinema or art appreciation. The social sciences requirement can be met while the student is getting 25 hours of political science or history or sociology. My point is that it is quite possible for a student to get a bachelor of arts degree without getting that broad education that so many of the editors listed as a requirement. I have learned from my 12 years of counselling students that journalism types tend particularly to shy away from courses in economics and the natural sciences, particularly chemistry and physics. But some of them have been gung-ho to report about the environment, which is now and will continue to be one of the major concerns of society. But how do you report about the environment intelligently if you know nothing about chemistry (all pollutants are chemicals) and nothing about economics (paying for the control of pollution is an economic problem)?

The editor of one Indiana newspaper of 30,000 circulation wrote: "We can train them how to run anything from a pencil to a VDT after they get here. We cannot give short courses in supply and demand or the free enterprise system after discovering that a reporter is ignorant in basic education."

Should we, then, require of students in the newspaper sequence courses in economics, government, history, the physical sciences and psychology?

5. Should we be more hard-nosed about requiring at least a semester's work on the school newspaper, or a full-time summer internship, as part of the requirement for the degree in the newspaper sequence? This could be another means of weeding out those who are not fully committed to a career in newspaper journalism.

6. Should we attempt to fill some of the gaps editors find in their staffs by offering, in cooperation with other departments of the university, short courses in economics, government, environmental chemistry and whatever else is perceived as a need? Or short courses in some of our own disciplines, including communications law? One newspaper in the survey had been hit with so many libel and invasion of privacy suits recently that it was having compulsory once-a-month seminars in law for its reporters and editors.

7. The final question is addressed not to us who teach Journalism, but to the editors who hire our products, more particularly to those who hire any liberal arts graduate who says he or she wants to be a reporter. If we put our

house in order and turn out young men and women with the potential of becoming fully qualified professionals, will you hire them and pay them what they are worth? Or will you continue to hire without regard to what we do or what we can tell you about a student's abilities--and then complain about what you get? One managing editor said with some embarrassment that he was about to discharge a copy editor who had both a bachelor's and a master's degree from I.U. Although the copy editor was a young man I had no recollection of him. Finally, the editor checked his file. The copy editor had two I.U. degrees, sure enough--both of them in English.